

## Mafia Spies in Cuba

It is well known that when the CIA had dirty work to do in Cuba, it turned to an organization that had long tentacles around that country: the Mafia. In 1961 the CIA, according to reliable sources, put out a contract to Mafia Leaders Sam Giancana and John Roselli for the assassination of Fidel Castro (TIME, March 17). In a separate and equally futile action, TIME has learned, the CIA enlisted other Mafia figures to do some spying in Cuba in preparation for the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion.

The Mafiosi were Russell Bufalino, now the mob boss in Scranton, Pa., and two lesser fry: James Plumeri and Salvatore ("Sally Burns") Granello, of New York City. Before Castro overthrew Dictator Fulgencio Batista in 1959, the three men controlled a race track and a huge gambling casino near Havana. When Castro took power, he banished the three. The trio left behind \$450,000, which they asked friends to hold for them. The money, the take from the casino's last days, belonged to Mafia clans in New York, Chicago and Pittsburgh.

**One Road.** When the CIA was planning the Bay of Pigs invasion, its agents learned about the \$450,000 and reckoned that Bufalino, Plumeri and Granello would be anxious to get even with Castro. The agency asked the three to use their contacts in Cuba to assess the chances that an invasion would set off a popular uprising against Castro. The CIA also assigned the Mafia to pinpoint the roads that Castro might use to deploy troops and tanks in meeting attacking forces. Bufalino, Plumeri and Granello ordered their old contacts on the island to set up a small network of spies and authorized part of the \$450,000 to be used for paying them.

But the spies helped neither the Mafiosi nor the CIA. The information they turned up, says one knowing source, "was a lot of garbage. They claimed that they had found that an insurrection was in the works, but, of course, it never came off. And you didn't need spies to tell you about the roads. There was only one road to the beach that Castro could have used."

The Mafia trio had good reason to encourage the invasion: if Castro fell, they had a chance not only to retrieve what was left of the \$450,000 but possibly to return to their lucrative business in Havana. In addition, Plumeri and Granello had secretly left behind another \$300,000, which they had got by short-changing the mob on the take from the gambling casino. The money was buried in a field outside Havana.

Both Granello and Plumeri later were victims of gangland murders in New York City. Until their executions, both men fretted over the thought of their greenbacks slowly rotting in the Cuban earth.

CIA 4 Cuba

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